The Arts and Youth at Risk
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all we would like to thank the authors who contributed to this edited collection. While this book is global in conception, it is the first volume of articles about arts-based interventions for “at risk” youth to focus on the Australian experience. These contributions show the depth of research being undertaken “Down Under” and the complexities and challenges associated with the range of school, community and institutional contexts discussed in this volume.

We would also like to thank Professor Shirley Brice Heath, who has been a source of inspiration and encouragement to us in this work. She has outlined the significance of this volume in her Foreword. She provides a global context for readers, identifying past, current and emerging trends in social and educational interventions with young people. Thank you also to Dr Peter O’Connor, our other international voice, whose personal and professional reflections conclude this book. When he remembers the good ladies who provided charity to his childhood family he asks himself if he is doing more harm than good in his contemporary work with troubled young people. This is the ethical challenge for all of us locally and globally; it is the question that underpins most of the articles in this book. We hope this book will challenge you to question your own motivations and practices.

These chapters are elaborated versions of papers that were first presented and discussed at the Risky Business Symposium held at The University of Melbourne, Australia, 20–22 October 2005. The symposium was the culminating event for Risky Business, a four-year research project into the impact of arts-based interventions for young people “at risk”. The Risky Business project was funded by the Australian Research Council and a range of industry organizations, all stakeholders in this area, including the Australia Council for the Arts, Arts Victoria, the Melbourne Magistrates’ Court, the Victorian State Government Departments of Justice and Human Services (Juvenile Justice), VicHealth and providers of youth services: Whitelion, Visycare and St Luke’s, Bendigo. We are grateful for their financial and in-kind support. We could not have done the research without this funding.

As you read these chapters, you will be aware that none of the research projects discussed could have been completed without financial backing from government and non-government organizations. On behalf of those...
who research this area in Australia and our authors, we acknowledge that support. We hope that this book will generate interest in arts-based interventions for “at risk” youth and will increase structural and financial support across the sectors that focus on young people, including health and wellbeing, justice, education and the arts.

The Risky Business Symposium was funded by VicHealth, the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation that is the peak body for health promotion in Victoria, Australia. VicHealth advocates health promotion as a powerful, cost-effective and efficient way to maintain a healthier community. Rather than focusing on people at risk for specific diseases, health promotion involves the population as a whole in the context of their everyday lives. Activities are geared toward promoting health and preventing ill-health. Community arts funding is a priority for VicHealth who recognize the potential of arts participation and engagement to build wellbeing and social connectedness.

We are grateful to a number of people who assisted us with the preparation and running of this Symposium and this subsequent publication. Tim Stitz, the Risky Business Administrator organized the Symposium with characteristic flair. He has also been our publication manager. Risky Business doctoral student Kiersten Coulter worked with industry partners Judy Morton from Arts Victoria and Susan Ball from VicHealth on the Symposium steering committee. Thanks are also due to Diane Brown, the copy editor, Kimba Griffith, the formatting editor, and to Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

We were fortunate to have the opportunity to meet and work with an exceptional group of community and professional artists throughout the life of the Risky Business project and a number of them spoke about their work at the Symposium. We also had the opportunity to meet with many of the young people involved in these programs and to share their arts making and something of their life stories. This book salutes the dedication, energy and courage of the contributors to the Risky Business project.

Angela O’Brien and Kate Donelan
April 2008
I am pleased to have a role in this philosophically complex and pragmatically provocative book. The editors and authors take the brave stance of interrogating the consequences, trajectories, and effects of participation in the arts by young people – especially those who carry labels such as “at risk”. In this foreword, I attempt to underscore and extend some of the central tenets of this volume. I do so by calling attention to the critical need to consider contextual background as well as an international perspective on children and youth.

**Contextual framing**

This volume steps into a fast-moving stream of international concern about the health and welfare of children and young adults ignored or not adequately cared for by their families and the State. Experts in human development as well as policymakers within the United Nations, World Health Organization, and national and regional governments look beyond family, school and the justice system to find contexts that can effectively fill the non-family and non-school hours of young people in nations across the economic spectrum. Economically powerful nations, such as Australia, Canada, Germany, Great Britain and the United States, increasingly face the perplexing question of why so many of their young find their way into trouble – most often with alcohol and other mind-altering substances and through reckless experimentation that leads to conflict with legal authorities. Impoverished nations, whose children have suffered from ethnic warfare, famine, refugee life, and the absence of educational and medical benefits, know that their future depends on the young who desperately need dependable support that families, international agencies, and nation states cannot now provide.

In the wide range of contexts of need from economically advanced nations to impoverished and war-torn states, new channels of learning, reconciliation, and meaningful apprenticeship must take up critical roles. They have to do so within the simultaneity of despair over environmental degradation and elation over the rapid spread of technology and popular
media around the world. Ironically, the coupling of these phenomena, acknowledged widely in the first decade of the twenty-first century and certain to continue throughout the century, pushes for another unlikely connection — that of the arts to acknowledge exploration in the sciences, especially the environmental sciences.

A turn to the arts as a source of help for and with the young is not new in developed nations. In nations facing famine, ethnic rivalries, political unrest, and inadequate educational and economic opportunities, the potential of the arts has been only minimally explored, for participation in the arts is likely to be judged as unaffordable, irrelevant and ineffectual. However, it is not unreasonable to expect that increasingly international groups and independent social entrepreneurs will look to the arts as platform and partner in knowledge advancement among the young in nations that lack state will and resources to enable their educational systems to meet societal needs.

In the past two decades, a similar kind of recognition led well-meaning change agents in economically advanced nations to put forward participation in the arts as remediation and redemption instruments of personal and social change for young people. Arts “programs,” “projects,” and “experience” were promoted for their potential to bring changes — emotional, social, and academic — to the young. Arts opportunities were praised for “giving” the young “empowerment,” “voice” and “confidence” (cf. Hetland et al. 2007).

In these nations, much ink and many bombastic speeches have claimed these benefits from the arts as well as improved self-esteem, growth in understanding and positive life-changing consequences. Yet little social science research backs these claims. Until now, few critics have stepped forward to point out this fact. Even more infrequent have been critical examinations of the potential of the arts for children and the young in developing nations, and how learning in the arts might work in these contexts to deepen and spread environmental, educational, and health information and skills. This refreshingly honest volume gives us the direct, thoughtful, and insightful background that will lead us to look closely at not only the political and economic contexts for the work of the arts with and through young people, but also the extent of substance and innovative power actually available through the arts.

It should be evident that the local learning environment and circumstances of arts opportunities make all the difference on the question of whether or not the arts are appropriate, inclusive, and effective in meeting local needs. Are possibilities voluntary or mandated (often as part of juvenile justice or education rehabilitation or remediation programs)? Is
the work in the arts only short-term entry-level work in which the young never have the chance to struggle through the intermediate and advanced work that builds expertise in performance and aesthetic judgment? Do the offerings receive professional instruction and critique that will bring excellence of achievement, enable the work to move beyond the local, and sustain the means by which the young can become expert enough to pass on their skills and knowledge to younger learners?

Advocacy of the arts, often through enthusiasts who have themselves found life values in their own work in the arts, has taken precedence over long-term theory-based examinations of arts learning environments – both within and beyond schools. Fundamental flaws in excessive and exaggerated claims for the arts have resulted primarily from three misguided notions:

1. Learning is monolinear in direction.
2. Positive learning experiences “naturally” transfer to other circumstances.
3. Learning in art forms enhances individual achievement that can be measured in ways similar to quantifiable achievement in other domains.
4. The arts, more than other “subjects”, offer “diversionary” as well as “compensatory” opportunities for learning.

Those who wish to claim educational advancement through arts participation have been particularly susceptible to these fallacies, for these four notions occur routinely in academic curricular and assessment thinking.

Research that could offer “clean” evidence on the effects of the arts demands one or more control or comparison groups with which individuals in arts “treatment” or “intervention” can be compared. In addition, some kind of equivalency of “treatment” has to be delineated, along with identification of outcomes that can be measured or quantified. Any pre and post-tests need to be normalized on a representatively sampled population. Ideally, such research is longitudinal as well as cross-sector, with follow-up that can exclude other “interventions” in the lives of individuals that might well have overtaken any “effects” of the arts.

Such studies are expensive, require cross-disciplinary collaboration, and need to promise some kind of economic return for a constituency powerful enough to push for policy change. Artists have historically held little political power as a group, and their professional identity has never been wrapped in either stable or high financial returns. Thus research that “finds in favor of artists” is unlikely to enlist a constituency powerful
enough to persuade political and financial forces to turn positive research results into accepted practice.

Underlying the arguments of this volume is recognition of the above factors and many more. This book makes clear that if the arts as agent of change for individuals and their communities are to carry long-term effects, certain conditions for participation in the arts have to be present. Regardless of type of organization (e.g., school, museum, youth association or community group), day-to-day within program contexts and conditions need certain consistent features (cf. Heath 2007, 2006; Heath and Smyth 1999). These will ensure that children and the young learn in environments that offer the following:

1. Sustained co-learning with adult professionals as expert mentors over long periods of time.
2. Meaningful reliance on referenced knowledge from written, curated, demonstrated, and performed sources and models.
3. High-risk expectations for collaborative exhibition, performance, or production.
4. Opportunities for the practice and guidance needed to move from beginning levels of skill to explore intermediate and advanced achievement.

Though different art forms require different periods of time for reaching satisfactory levels of performance or production, achievement in all art forms takes hard work, study, practice, and sustained access to good models and tough-love guidance. Moreover, high expectations have to hold, meaning that those who plan and implement opportunities for the arts with the young must know and respect the capacity of children and adolescents to undertake and often to lead in thinking through the arts (cf. Matthews 1999).

Two points regarding the arts and learning stand out historically – in Western and Eastern history as well as in studies of the role of artists in indigenous societies. First is the close tie between work in the arts and knowledge of science – whether botany, animal anatomy, architecture, astronomy, or technology. Second is the need for apprenticeship with periods of scaffolded learning that carries meaning and receives critique from within the local community. The scientific and sustained bases of the arts demand that learners have sustained opportunities to draw upon their observational, mimetic, and critical skills throughout their stages of learning (Austin 2001; Perkins 1994). Artists across history and societies have often been innovators, forecasters of change, spiritual interpreters, and cautionary voices on human greed and disregard for the environment. These facts tell us the world needs artists, and the young need the arts.
International youth perspective

The dichotomy between rich and poor nations set out in the preceding sections does not go far enough in cautioning us to ask some comparative questions about how children and young people get defined under different circumstances, and what difference these definitions might make for learning in the arts. Here it is essential that we note the place of young people in their local and broad social-relational systems and the extent to which the young are subject to the stresses of economic, political and educational forces.

In the past two decades, nations such as Australia, the United States and Canada, as well as many European nations, have drastically increased expectations for the percentage of secondary school graduates and even university enrollments. For those who do not complete secondary school or do not enroll in advanced or higher education, social consequences follow. Information-based economies demand of their labor force a facility with oral and written language, as well as numeracy and technological skills. Service skills and manual labor, though acknowledged as essential to the smooth operation of information-based and high-tech societies, fall to the bottom of the list of “desired” occupations. Some attribute this “inequality” to social causation, while others say it is a matter of self-selection. The arts, long associated with “crafts,” are often left with little regard except for their leisure-time benefits or entertainment value. Thus there may be a deep-seated sense of “appropriate” in the choice of the arts in the past two decades as an educational or esteem-building means for the young who have already been labeled “at risk” of not achieving school completion and successful university education.

In economically advanced societies, it is primarily the elite who are likely to value academic achievement over manual adeptness. Such a view carries with it an implicit acceptance of a scope-and-sequence linear path of achievement as critical to school achievement. In contrast, manual dexterity and a handy way with machines, technology, the arts or “people skills” rarely come in a predictable trajectory. Early facility or bursts of achievement mark the latter, leaving highly unclear just how those talented in these areas fit into maturation trajectories. Because such individuals often select what they want to do over what others set out for them to do, their maturity and judgment are often seen as inadequate, wrong-headed, or just plain “dangerous” for these individuals and those around them.

Yet a variety of theories of human development, including ecological theory (Brofenbrenner 1979), socio-historical theories (Vygotsky 1994/1930; Bakhtin 1986), and critical race/ethnicity theories (Cross 1991),
urge researchers to take into account how young people internalize the values and practices of social systems. This kind of attention is essential when young people’s individual talents or cultural/community norms differ from those dominant in the society. To be sure, youth and society are interdependent, but in cases in which the maturation and judgment, as well as the chosen talents or directions of youth, do not match those of educational systems, researchers have to look beyond individual differences to political and economic factors. Much of what we do in society moves us along toward unquestioning social reproduction with little or no attention to adaptive or transformative factors. We have to consider the extent to which this kind of reproductive push places stress on young people who see no reason to value this blind drive toward more of the same from the past.

We see this point demonstrated, for example, when young people take up functions in some communities that adults either cannot or do not want to serve. The young fill gaps that adults neither see nor may wish to be filled. In various parts of the world, young people step forward to help provide economic support for their families, work for environmental and social justice, and advocate for community sustainability. In Boston, Massachusetts, the only all-green building in the city was initiated by a group of young people who had established a community arts organization for young people (Heath 2005, 2000; Heath and Street 1999). In Mumbai, India, street children persuaded a group of elite women to establish Child Line, a free help line for street children in need of assistance (Heath and Robinson 2004). Today the functions of that group have been included in regional governmental responsibilities, and the concept has spread to other nations (Elkington and Hartigan 2008).

In almost all instances, when young people initiate such programs, the arts figure centrally in their mission and communicational effectiveness. Children and the young express their own and their communities’ “need to know” through the arts, and they move toward social change with the arts in full partnership. Moreover, the arts enable empathy – the willingness to see the positions of others and to get to know them when older members of a society may wish to forget, reduce their reflections, or ignore what is “different” or “other”. Young people in nations where hatred and fear have held people apart for centuries often want to explore the past, talk about it, and find new ways to express and represent it (Daiute et al. 2006). The young who opt out of conventional school norms of achievement or who have been denied opportunities for schooling are often those who find their way to the arts and alternative ways of making a difference in their societies.
This book is designed for readers who care about their communities and are willing to create institutions and negotiate for meaningful roles for young people (cf. Rabkin and Redmond 2004). Explanations supported by theory and research from across the disciplines address the need to think and to think hard about where and how the arts and young people fit together and in concert with moral reason, societal inclusion and environmental justice. To do otherwise is to risk denying the benefits that can come from the ingenious insights and seemingly endless energies and imaginative powers of the young. This book calls on us to think beyond “using” the arts for instrumental redirection of young individuals seen as being out-of-step with the larger society.

We simply must expect more from both the arts and the young. Creativity, adaptability and transformation lie at the heart of the arts. So too do these same elements lie deeply within the sciences. Yet arts programs for the young rarely couple science and arts. Knowledge of the body and the way it works figure centrally in the life of dancers, martial arts specialists and actors. Information and theories about chemical components and conditions of exposure figure centrally in the work of visual artists. Musicians work with mathematics and the physics of sound through their instruments. Sculptors and illustrators know deeply the geological, botanical and anatomical elements of the objects of their portrayals. Why is it that arts programs for the young leave aside the long-standing inextricable interdependence of the sciences and arts? Could it be that this acknowledgment would mean having to take the arts and the young too seriously? Could it mean that doing so would bring too much respect to both the arts and the young? These are critical questions for arts advocates.

What happens when facts challenge value? For too long, it may be that complacent valuing of the arts has led us to ignore facts – historical, sociological and cognitive. Let the next steps in our rethinking the arts and youth not begin until we can answer questions raised in this volume. We should do so wanting to cherish the good, the strong, the imaginative, and the social and political promise of youth creativity in the experiment of living for now and the future.

Works Cited


CHAPTER ONE

RETHINKING THE ARTS AND YOUTH
“AT RISK”

ANGELA O’BRIEN & KATE DONELAN

This book is a contribution to the lively international dialogue about creative and arts-based interventions for young people categorized as “at risk”. The instrumental benefit of arts participation for disadvantaged and marginalized young people is an area of increasing interest worldwide. A body of research highlights the positive educational and social outcomes of arts programs within and outside the schooling system (Grumet 2004; Rabkin et al. 2004; Deasy 2002; Brice Heath 1999; Dreeszen et al. 1999; Fiske 1999). Studies in the USA, reported by the RAND Corporation, offer a systematic analysis of the intrinsic and instrumental benefits – cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral, health, social and economic – of young people’s participation in creative arts activities (McCarthy et al. 2004; Stone et al. 1998, 1997; McArthur and Law 1996). British research including the UK National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (2000) and Creative Partnerships, a large ongoing project between the British Arts Council and educational authorities, demonstrates the individual and community value of arts participation and enhanced learning across the whole curricula where the arts are privileged (Brice Heath and Wolf 2005, 2004). A number of studies reveal that out-of-school performing arts programs can provide rich learning contexts and a sense of agency for disadvantaged and “at risk” young people (Brice Heath 2000; Hughes and Wilson 2003). There is a strong argument for the development of methodological approaches that not only generate a useful evidence base to support arts interventions, but provide a depth of understanding of complex human interactions in potentially difficult research sites (Oakley 2007; Bamford 2006).
In Australia, there has been less systematic longitudinal research in this area, but a number of studies support the North American and British findings (O’Brien and Donelan 2007; Jones 2000; Marsden and Thiele 2000). Recent Australian Government initiatives have generated research into arts and education, the arts and wellbeing, and the arts and community (Hunter 2005; Bryce et al. 2004). A national study into *Art and Wellbeing* highlights the use of arts practice as a way of connecting people to support networks and community to achieve better health outcomes. Young people “at risk” and marginalized social groups are the focus of many case studies within this report, with researchers arguing that engagement in arts practice can promote confidence, resilience, communication skills and connectedness to others (Mills and Brown 2004; Thiele and Marsden 2003).

This book has its origins in the *Risky Business* research project (2002-05) – a major Australian study into the use of the creative arts as diversionary activities for youth “at risk”. This four-year ethnographic study was designed to investigate the qualities and impact of effective arts programs with highly marginalized young people. The *Risky Business* project was conducted as a cross-disciplinary collaboration between the editors of this book, Angela O’Brien from Creative Arts and Kate Donelan from Arts Education, with doctoral student, Kiersten Coulter from Criminology, and industry partners from the fields of justice, health, the arts, human services and youth support services.

At a time when the arts are seen by many as a panacea for social disadvantage, we argue that it is important to interrogate key assumptions about the nature and purpose of work in this complex and difficult area. This book is designed both to profile the findings of recent research and to generate debate. Whilst many of the writers argue strongly for the value of creative diversionary programs they also raise questions about the claims made for the wide-ranging benefits of the arts for “at risk” young people, and the role of arts programs in reducing and preventing socially unacceptable and harmful behavior. Like many of the writers of these chapters, we welcome the increasing body of evidence demonstrating the positive aspects of engagement in creative arts activities for “at risk” young people. However, in what has evolved into something of a climate of advocacy for the pro-social benefits of the arts for vulnerable and disadvantaged communities, we see a need for a more critical discussion.

This book elaborates on the discussions about the efficacy of arts interventions for youth “at risk” that was a theme of the 2005 *Risky Business* Symposium held at the University of Melbourne. International presenters from youth studies, arts therapy, community and applied arts,
education, criminology and juvenile justice engaged in a cross-disciplinary dialogue about the arts with young, socially marginalized people and examined the concept of “risk taking” in arts practice within an institutional and community context. Based on their work in a range of programs, artists and researchers spoke positively about the value of implementing arts programs for socially marginalized people, and the potential impact of alternative creative interventions on young people’s future pathways. However, there was also debate about and critique of the categorization of young people as “at risk”, the motivations of those using applied arts as an instrument of positive social change, and the ethical challenges of arts-based interventions.

Much of the research presented in these chapters occurs in an Australian context. Researchers draw on a range of theoretical perspectives and critical lenses to examine arts-based models of work with diverse groups of marginalized young people. Many of these authors provide contextualized accounts of arts activities, drawing on data that illuminates the ways in which particular young people have engaged with artists and with creative practices. The voices of the young people within these chapters reveal the constructive and re-constructive potential of the arts, showing that through the use of artistic processes and creative media young people can rebuild their sense of personal and social identity, shape and represent their views of the world, and re-imagine their future. The book also underlines the challenges inherent in using an applied arts approach with young “at risk” people. Many of these accounts of programs illustrate the problems faced by artists working with young people in custodial settings, drug rehabilitation, schools and community centers.

The first group of chapters opens up areas of critical debate about the use of the arts with disadvantaged and socially marginalized young people. The writers challenge the prevailing discourses informing current social, cultural and educational policy, including the problematizing of youth, the social efficacy of the arts, and cognitive behavioral models of rehabilitation for young offenders.

Helen Cahill questions the metaphors of “risk and rescue” within a social justice agenda. She discusses the differing perspectives on youth identity and agency that arise in the psychological and sociological research traditions and their relevance to arts projects which aim to empower “at risk” youth. She critiques the positioning of young people as passive victims or as “deviants” needing correction and argues instead that young people need to be seen as active and contributing cultural citizens. Examining the assumptions that can influence the architecture of work with young people, she notes that when youth are grouped around their
“risk” status this can negatively impact upon program outcomes. Cahill offers a number of recommendations to guide the design of arts-based interventions, stressing the value of political, community or service-based modes of activity. She argues that arts programs should encourage young people to contest old stories and develop new narratives of self. Cahill challenges program leaders to examine the purpose of the arts intervention and the positioning of participants, and to ask whether the artworks “stereotype, demonize, glamorize or reinforce victim/oppressor stories”. She discusses two drama programs that illustrate ways in which young people can take on meaningful roles with purpose and value within projects. She also highlights the importance of artists and teachers using theatrical conventions to provide narrative and aesthetic distance and protective framing for young people’s personal material.

Martina Boese investigates the politics of achieving social inclusion through the arts in the light of recent critical perspectives about cultural activities as a vehicle for social change. She notes that in the present political context artists increasingly need to justify their work. Her chapter traces the path from community arts to more recent approaches to achieving social inclusion through culture. Boese examines some of the criticisms of these approaches, putting particular emphasis on training and employment initiatives within the emergent field of the “creative industries”. She suggests that the use of the arts for social inclusion gained official recognition in the UK under Blair’s New Labor Government and became the rationale for cultural investment. She identifies the global shift towards a policy agenda based on a neo-liberal discourse that promotes the arts for social and economic objectives. Her chapter asks whether this instrumental approach to the arts reduces rather than enhances their intrinsic value, and supports exploitative working conditions and unstable employment for those working in the arts. She draws on two empirical studies of arts interventions with disadvantaged youth in Vienna and Manchester to illustrate the importance of understanding culturally inclusive projects within their broader social, economic and political context. While she acknowledges criticisms of these projects she also argues for the potential of these types of projects to facilitate active citizenship.

Two chapters deal specifically with arts interventions with young offenders. Mark Brown is concerned with how young people stop offending and how the techniques, strategies and programs of arts-based interventions might play a role in reducing recidivism. Brown identifies key issues in theory and policy relevant to arts-based interventions and reviews some emerging findings that indicate an important role for this...
type of work in holistic, process-based interventions with young people “at risk” of offending. He outlines the policy context in Victoria, Australia following the implementation of the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy, which draws on the same principles of risk assessment and risk management that guides adult rehabilitation in many western jurisdictions. He critiques the limitations of this deficit “risk-needs” model and sees the cognitive behavioral programs associated with it as “largely negative.” He explains the “desistance model” where rehabilitation is understood as a “process of stopping” and the causes of offending are understood within the context of the psychological, historical, ideological and structural factors that have shaped an individual’s social behavior. This model emphasizes positive and constructive work with young offenders who are positioned as active players in a process of change. Like Cahill, he stresses narrative identity as a key element in bringing about change through arts interventions. He argues that arts-based programs complement a desistance model as they provide a means for young offenders to construct a more positive and future-oriented sense of personal and social identity.

Kiersten Coulter draws on her work within the *Risky Business* project in two gender-specific custodial sites for young adults in Victoria, Australia. Coulter addresses the theoretical, conceptual and policy frameworks outlined by Brown and focuses particularly on the “desistance model”. She argues that a significant gap in the criminological literature is the linking of the causes and consequences of offending and the development of risk factors with the processes and outcomes from arts-based research with offenders. She proposes that “intrinsic value”, “narrative identity” and “responsivity”, three concepts identified by Brown, are the means by which arts programs potentially contribute to the process of desistance from offending. Coulter’s chapter seeks to answer a number of critical questions: can arts-based programs make a positive impact on young offenders and if so, what are the qualities of these programs, their expected outcomes and challenges? What kinds of arts programs can deliver outcomes that are theoretically and conceptually coherent? How are the outcomes linked to processes of desistance? She applies various intervention models outlined by Brown to her analysis of data from the *Risky Business* project. She draws on the words of young men and women who participated in the custodial drama and performance projects to provide evidence of a range of positive outcomes of these projects with young offenders within challenging settings. Coulter argues that arts-based programs form part of the solution on a pathway towards desistance from offending. She highlights the need for further research to identify the nature of the support necessary to address critical structural
barriers, thus enabling arts-based programs for young offenders to be sustained and benefits to endure.

Dave Kelman focuses on _My Story/Our Stories_, his study of young people’s enacted stories in two schools in the inner western suburbs of Melbourne. As the artistic director of a youth arts organization Kelman mentors and trains young emerging artists from diverse cultural backgrounds to work in teams with young people in school and community arts projects. In the drama projects that are the focus of this chapter the young participants, from economically and culturally marginalized communities, are “at risk” of disengaging from education and becoming involved in damaging behaviors. From his perspective as an artist-researcher, Kelman investigates how values, power, identities and narrative meanings are explored dialogically within the pedagogic space of the drama workshop. His account also examines the young people’s resistance to involvement in processes that they perceive expose them to risk of ridicule from their peers. Like Cahill and Coulter, Kelman is interested in young people’s narratives that are both constructive and re-constructive. He suggests that within these drama and performance projects the young people were involved in developing self-narratives of social agency. In devising and performing these plays the young people constructed meaningful moral frameworks and explored and challenged their own values. Kelman argues that at their most effective, these drama programs facilitated a dialogue between young people and their audiences through the performance of stories that were significant to themselves and their community.

John Hughes and Mat Howard present research that examines the positive role of the Shakespeare Globe Centre Australia’s Youth Festival – specifically in providing “a refuge” for vulnerable and isolated gay male students. The Shakespeare Globe Centre Australia conducts a nationwide Festival that involves 20,000 students annually who perform excerpts from Shakespeare, compose music, create a dance piece or design a production. The Festival begins in schools, and selected students attend a regional event and a State Festival. Hughes and Howard highlight the impact of the Festival experience on the welfare of marginalized youth from regional Australia. A case study of a young, same-sex attracted regional participant is presented through the extended narrative voice of “Orsino” who provides a sustained reflection on the impact of the Festival. This chapter exemplifies how life history and narrative analysis can generate powerful insights into the lived experience of “at risk” young people. “Orsino’s” account reveals how a vulnerable young man was able to build a more positive sense of his future through his engagement with the arts. This
narrative is interpolated into Hughes and Howard’s analysis of the ways in which participation in an extended theatre program can provide the means for marginalized school students to “re-imagine” themselves and reconstruct their lives.

Sharon Hogan draws on her study of *The Arts Pathways Initiative*, a Queensland Government program using contemporary art forms in an attempt to re-engage young people “at-risk” with formal education, training and employment programs. Hogan links the idea of adolescents as risk takers negotiating the complexities of social and cultural identity with the role of imagination and creativity in building resilience. She proposes that arts-based programs can offer young people a transitional and safe space for exploring identity, defining new social roles and building new pathways. However, based on her study of *The Arts Pathways Initiative* she argues that arts programs alone offer little benefit to “at risk” young people if they are short-term and unless adequate support structures and effective partnerships between educational institutions, youth service organizations and artists are in place. Significantly her analysis reveals that the young people in the program preferred a mediated arts experience where their personal lives were not the focus of the arts work. Hogan proposes that arts-based programs designed to re-engage young people should be run by artists and educators capable of building positive and respectful relationships, and that they should be flexible with multiple exit and entry points.

Bruce Burton reports on a ten-year action research project with John O’Toole investigating the implementation of DRACON, a drama-based education program in schools on bullying and conflict management. The project began in Queensland in collaboration with the international DRACON research program into conflict within schools, with partners in Sweden and Malaysia. Using a unique combination of drama and peer teaching, the program (also known as “Cooling Conflicts”) has been conducted in more than eighty schools and continues to expand each year. Burton describes the structure of the program and argues that it provides a transformative educational experience, particularly for young people “at risk”, including those who have experienced bullying behavior. The program employs a modified version of Boal’s Forum Theatre involving participants in learning and enacting three stages of conflict and applying it to a simulated social situation. This interactive method also uses “hot seating” where participants take on roles designed to explore the various perspectives of those involved in a bullying or conflict incident. Burton reports a significant decline in bullying in at least one school in which the program has been conducted over an extended period of time. Burton
argues that drama provides an effective vehicle for change in that it inherently addresses human relationships, conflict and power.

Anna Hickey-Moody considers disability within the paradigm of risk. She argues that within this paradigm signs such as intellectual disability are read as indicators of lack and disadvantage which, when connected, produce a deficiency of possibility. Her identification of a deficit model concurs with Brown’s argument about the negative stereotyping of juvenile offenders. She suggests that dance theatre is a medium through which research can source positive images of young people with disabilities. Her chapter focuses on the Restless Dance Company’s 2001 production of *Proximal*. She employs Deleuzian concepts of affect and sensation to examine the company’s effectiveness in changing the way that bodies with intellectual disability are “thought”. She suggests that the “aesthetic embodied labor of restless dancers” disrupts a deficit model of intellectual disability. Hickey-Moody argues that the work of the Restless Dance Company questions the nature of Cartesian assumptions about the relationship between mind and body, and draws upon what Deleuze and Guattari have called “the possible as an aesthetic category” (1996, 165). Through producing what they describe as “beings of sensation” these performers de-territorialize medical and sociological discourses of intellectual disability. There is a parallel here between the narrative reconstruction of identities proposed by Cahill, Brown and Kelman, and a reconfiguring of the way in which disabled performers in *Proximal* perceived themselves and were perceived by audiences through their dance.

Our own chapter draws extensively on our cross-disciplinary research project *Risky Business*. This ethnographic study across a number of community and custodial sites investigated the effectiveness of creative arts involvement as a diversionary intervention for highly marginalized young people. Over the four years of this study ten arts programs were conducted in urban and rural areas in South East Australia in association with youth support organizations and custodial centers. The *Risky Business* project has been analyzed in a recently published book (Donelan and O’Brien 2008) that outlines the arts programs, presents vignettes of young people, and discusses the research outcomes and policy recommendations. While we decided not to reproduce this information here, we felt it was important to offer some perspectives on such a significant body of material. We have chosen to reflect on our findings from *Risky Business* and interrogate them further, hopefully from a slightly more distanced stance. In our chapter we question how we might ensure that arts interventions with young people are ethically conceived and delivered.
Using our experiences within this research project we question the motivations of those of us working with “at risk” youth, and the ways in which we represent and respond to arts-based processes and products; we also critically scrutinize our selection of data, and our interpretations of instrumental and aesthetic outcomes. We notice that other contributors share our discomfort with some of the claims made for pro-social arts programs for youth, and we believe this signals a healthy commitment not to be seduced by socio-economic pressures into elevating the instrumental value of the arts and reducing their cultural and aesthetic qualities. We hope that this chapter will provoke readers to re-engage with some of the critical issues raised in the first group of chapters as they consider the other research projects presented in this book.

We have given the last word to Dr Peter O’Connor, the founder and artistic director of Everyday Theatre, an applied theatre company funded through the New Zealand Department of Child, Youth and Family Services as part of a national education campaign on child abuse, family violence and neglect. Everyday Theatre uses a dramatic process that invites young people to work together to explore social issues rather than presenting a predetermined message or previously scripted performance. In reflecting on this work O’Connor suggests that the success of the work of Everyday Theatre lies in its avoidance of the stance of “messenger or missionary”; instead it provides an uncontested space where young people can use the language of drama to explore and share their stories about the issues of abuse and family violence. In re-examining his work with young people and considering the positive and negative impacts of diversionary arts programs O’Connor shares his own memories of being a boy deemed to be “at risk”. From a poor single parent family, O’Connor was exposed to the “church ladies” who brought food parcels containing what was “needed” not what was wanted. As he recounts his own life experiences he questions the potentially problematic relationship between arts workers and young people categorized as “at risk” and asks whether he is doing “more harm than good” in his current work with young people.

This and associated questions begin and end this book. Are arts interventions with youth “at risk” efficacious? How can we ensure the work we do with young people is socially and politically ethical? In undertaking this work are we, as Boese suggests, complicit in a neo-liberalist agenda to use the arts for their instrumental value in ensuring a “smooth world” (Hardt and Negri 2000)? Can we, as Cahill argues, position the young people with whom we work as potential adult citizens, rather than victims or the perennially marginalized?
At the conclusion of his chapter, O’Connor reflects on his conversations with Maori elders who recognized the capacity of the arts to awaken the life force, to allow us to become and know our true selves. Turner expresses this notion in other ways; he suggests that the arts can engender a liminoid space where true creativity can begin (1986). This is, as Nicholson (2005) suggests, the “gift” that engagement in the arts can offer – a chance to share, to communicate, to transform, to create and recreate at the personal, community, local and global levels.

Works Cited


CHAPTER TWO

RESISTING RISK AND RESCUE AS THE RAISON D’ÊTRE FOR ARTS INTERVENTIONS

HELEN CAHILL

In this chapter I discuss the differing perspectives on youth identity and agency that arise in the psychological and sociological research traditions and consider their relevance to arts projects that aim to empower “at risk” youth. I focus on the metaphors underpinning the differing stances we are likely to take depending on the way we conceptualize who “youth at risk” are, and the purpose of our work. I examine evaluations of targeted interventions for “at risk” youth, which show that being grouped for the purposes of the interventions is associated with increased negative outcomes for the participants. I discuss the underpinning assumptions that can influence the architecture of work with “at risk” youth, and note the potential for the way youth are positioned and grouped around their “risk” status to detract from program outcomes. I offer a number of recommendations to guide reflection about the artistic and relational architecture that informs approaches to working with youth, recommending an approach that encompasses an interdisciplinary rigor and civic orientation in the design of arts-based intervention programs.

The knowledge gap

It is easy to assume that an arts-based intervention project that has been designed to contribute to the development or wellbeing of youth deemed to be “at risk” would, in fact, do just that. Often the combination of artistic skill and a committed social justice agenda distinguishes such projects. But from another perspective, well-meaning folk arrive, provide an experience, and then leave. The community goes on. What has been left behind? Are those who have participated in the project less likely to engage in harmful
behavior such as risky drug use, sexual risk-taking, offending, violence or truancy? The problem is when an arts-based intervention has taken place, we usually do not know, and we do not have the resources to follow-up with participants to assess short or long-term outcomes. What we get to do is to ask them about the experience, or observe as they encounter the experience.

Qualitative research is easier on a shoestring. Not only is it cheaper, we know it will deliver a sensitivity and depth of information that we could not hope to capture in a survey or through a psychological instrument used for pre- and post-testing. Consistently, participants in arts-based interventions speak with enthusiasm of the experience, of how it contributes to their sense of self. We feel good. Apparently they feel better. So what else do we need to know?

For a start, we need to acknowledge that there is a range of research dedicated to evaluating interventions for high-risk youth. One such tradition exists in the psychological field, where the dominant methodology is quantitative, and investment is made in employing closely matched intervention and control groups and utilizing psychological instruments to assess health status and behavior. On occasions a longitudinal approach is taken to assess the impact of the intervention in both the short and long-term. In this medicalized tradition, it is important to ascertain that the intervention has done no harm, as well as to ask whether it has accomplished its objectives.

Another relevant field, arising from a different research tradition, is that of the sociology of youth. Here research is primarily qualitative and theoretical. Emphasis is placed on considering the multiplicity of social factors affecting the ways in which young people construct their sense of self, including class, gender, sexual preference, ethnicity, location, culture, family and education (Dwyer and Wyn 2001).

Both traditions have important research to offer those using the arts to provide interventions for “at risk” youth. However, to embrace knowledge generated in both these broad traditions, one must first take a respectful stance towards the “cultures” of research and the language and terms used in these very different fields. I seek to do just that. I review recent research in the psychological tradition investigating high quality interventions for “at risk” youth, and turn to the sociological tradition to examine the assumptions made in this field.